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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes issues that may occur in schools with refugee children, examining how to cope with refugee children who are unable to participate adequately in school. It describes how these children's problems show up (e.g., explosive anger, problems with authority, disruptiveness, inability to concentrate, rule testing, withdrawal, academic failure, or age inappropriate behavior). These children have fled from dangerous and extremely difficult and frightening circumstances. They may be traumatized and may be struggling with the concept of attending school, with literacy (in English and their native language), and with cultural identity. Teachers may not know how to respond appropriately to these students. This booklet suggests ways in which teachers may help refugee children to cope with their emotions and manage their behavior. It is essential to establish links with the children's families, though it is often difficult to establish good communication with parents of traumatized refugee children. How to discipline refugee students is a complex issue, and consultation with child care and mental health professionals may be useful. Steps that teachers can take include managing their own feelings, being realistic, knowing what students need, managing students' behavior, referring children for specialist help, being supportive, and welcoming refugees. Three appendices contain case studies, relevant addresses and resources, and a list of material for further reading. (SM)

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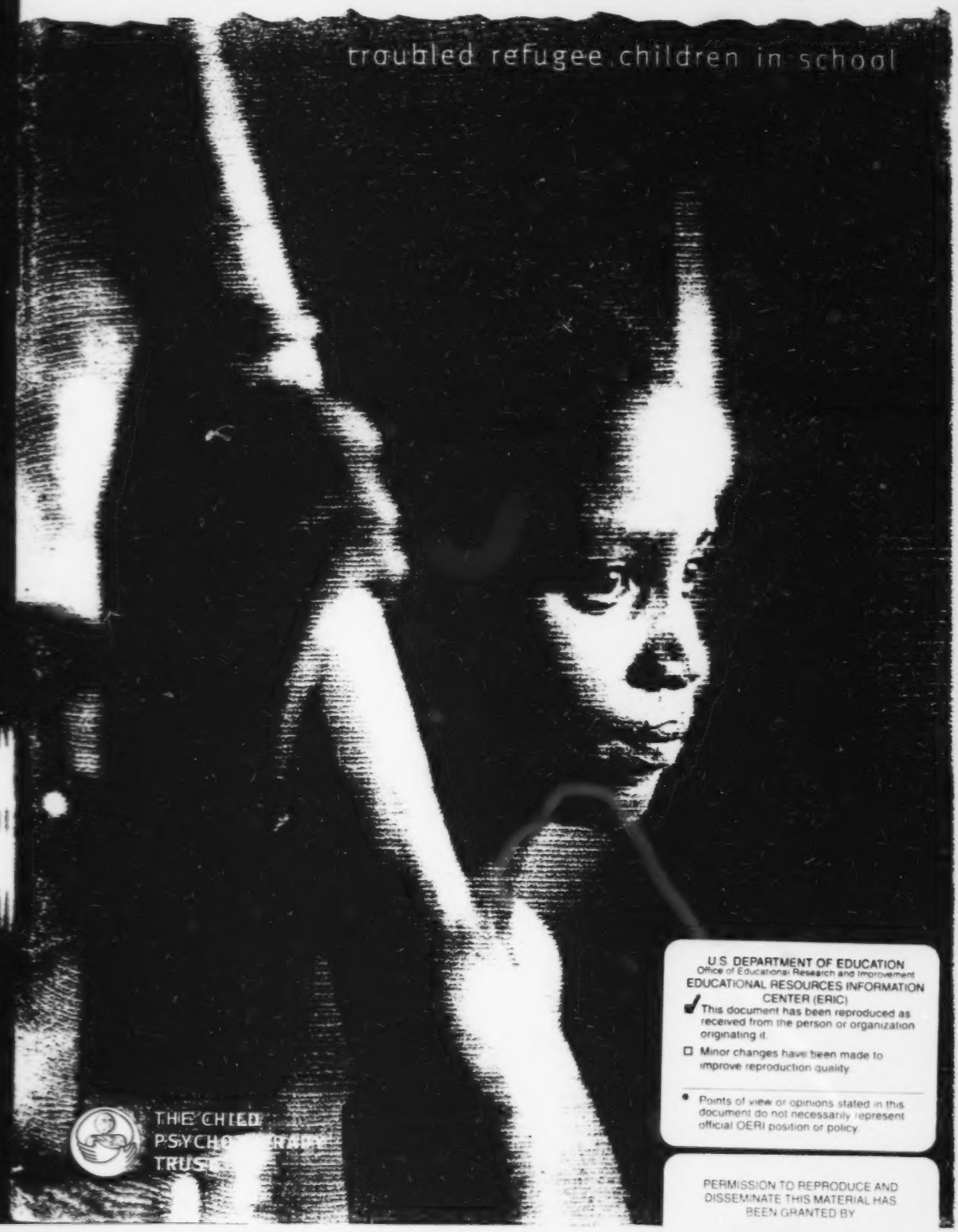
Far from the battle but still at war

DICK BLACKWELL
and SHEILA MELLAN

troubled refugee children in school



THE CHILD PSYCHOTHERAPY TRUST

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How this booklet came about

This booklet is based on the work of a joint Child Psychotherapy Trust sponsored action research project working with families and children referred to the Medical Foundation Caring for Victims of Torture.

The project is carried out by a Child Psychotherapist and a Family Therapist working together directly with families and children and providing consultation to schools who refer children they are concerned about to the Medical Foundation.

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The joint project would not have been possible without the support of The Casey Trust, BBC Children in Need, The Network for Social Change, News International, Alchemy Foundation, ITT Charitable Trust.

We are extremely grateful to the Allen Lane Foundation, John Lyon's Charity and Carlton Television Trust for supporting the booklet.

A second booklet produced by this project for social services and social workers written by Sheila Melzak and Dick Blackwell will be available from the Child Psychotherapy Trust (CPT).

If you would like information about the booklets or supporting seminars, please contact CPT.

The Child Psychotherapy Trust provides information on children's emotional development and behaviour to parents, and direct support for organisations working with children and families. We seek to increase the access of children and families in need of help to effective psychotherapeutic services in a number of ways.

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what this booklet is and what it is not

This booklet is not one of the various excellent texts on how to teach refugee children (see list at end of booklet). Such texts provide a number of ideas and approaches whereby children can learn about their own countries, cultures and traditions, and process their experiences of exile, within the educational context of the classroom. They may even be helped to process some of the more distressing aspects of that experience by writing and drawing and talking about their lives and their background within an educational context. But this approach is not always sufficient for all refugee children, particularly those who have had the more horrific personal experiences.

The problems described here may occur in schools which have many refugee children and a highly developed programme for assisting them, and they may occur in schools where there are so few refugees that it is not viable to have a general programme, and their needs can only be addressed on an individual basis. While circumstances will obviously vary according to whether the school is primary or secondary, state or independent, mainstream or special school, these same problems are likely to occur in some form or other and to create similar dilemmas.

It is important to emphasise in a booklet addressing the problems arising with refugee children that such children should not just be seen as problems. Many refugee children are well able to make a positive contribution to the school community. Teachers often report feeling greatly encouraged by the high value which many refugee families place on education and by the enthusiasm and commitment both parents and children bring to the school.

It is also important not to regard the problems and behaviours of refugee children as completely different from those of other children. Teachers reading this booklet may well recognise similarities with difficulties encountered with unhappy and distressed pupils who are not refugees.

However, this booklet is about coping in the school setting with those refugee children who, to a greater or lesser extent, are unable to participate adequately in the educational programme of the school. They may disrupt lessons, they may be uncontrollably angry or violent in class or outside it. They may be quiet and withdrawn and completely disconnected from what is going on around them. They may just be unable to concentrate on school work. It is also about those refugee children who appear to manage the academic side of school quite well, but remain unhappy, sad, depressed and perhaps isolated, or even overtly or covertly at loggerheads with other children.

This booklet starts, in a sense, where the texts about the education of refugee children leave off. Children who have been so badly hurt and who have lost so much are not going to start feeling good very quickly. They are going to feel frightened, angry and sad for a long time. This is not so much a booklet about how to make them feel better, as how to help them cope with feeling so bad. In a way it is about how to help children be unhappy constructively.

In this process it is as important to recognise and understand what is going on as it is to try to do something about it. This may leave the reader with the feeling of being burdened or overwhelmed with information about painful problems and experiences without being able to do anything useful. Which is, of course, how many teachers feel in their contact with very distressed children. The point is that understanding is in itself a useful activity. So is tolerating the feelings of being overwhelmed, helpless and useless which is probably just what the child is feeling and finding intolerable.

This booklet is emphatically not about *all* refugee children, nor even about the **majority** of refugee children. It is about those who present special difficulties. Some of the things said here may be applicable to refugee children more generally, others may not!

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how do these children show up

The biggest mistake one can make is to believe there is one recognisable pattern of behaviour among refugee children. It is easy, on the basis of having had a significant number of refugee children come to a school, to begin to discern a pattern. Then one comes along who doesn't fit the pattern and her[1] needs get overlooked.

Refugees come from a wide range of cultures and have had very varied experiences. They are therefore going to present their needs and difficulties in a variety of ways. What we have outlined below are some of the ways we have found them expressing themselves. These include explosive anger, problems with authority, disruptiveness and inability to concentrate, rule testing, withdrawal, falling behind with their school work and age inappropriate behaviour.

This is not an exhaustive list and it is important to be prepared for something that does not fit these categories. It is also important to recognise that individual children are unlikely to fit neatly into one category or another and one child may at different times display all or any of the following.

Explosive anger

These children tend to explode with anger and rage at the slightest provocation. Someone pushes in front of them in a queue, or teases them in a way that is not uncommon among the other children, and they go to war. Their anger, and the level of violence they display seem quite out of proportion to the insult or slight they are reacting to.

What this explosion is in proportion to is the violence that has been done to them and their families in their home countries. They have indeed been in a war, and it is still going on. They are still fighting it in their heads. It is as if they carry the violence they have witnessed and suffered around inside them, ticking away like a bomb, waiting to explode.

In some cases, they themselves may be the provocateurs, seeking an opportunity to express their violent feelings.

When they become angry or violent they may seem out of control, ignoring commands from teachers to stop and needing to be physically restrained. Subsequently they may be reluctant to discuss the incident. When pressed they seem to have forgotten significant parts of it, and retell the story with themselves as the innocent victims of bullying, racism, verbal abuse from other children and of misunderstanding and indifference from teachers, who they see as having failed to protect them from the other children.

Problems with authority

These children may fluctuate between excessive deference towards authority figures such as teachers, and complete contempt for them.

In their experience they have felt badly let down by adults. Their parents have failed to protect them and their families, so have the leaders of their communities. Other supposedly responsible adults – political leaders, policemen, soldiers, have instigated or committed specific acts of violence against them. Yet because they are children they still need adults to help them learn about and make sense of the world, and of their own particular experiences. They need to be able to respect their parents. They need to believe there can be some good adults, otherwise there is no possibility for them to grow into good adults themselves.

Disruptiveness and inability to concentrate

These children need to be completely captivated by and engrossed in whatever they are doing in order for their minds not to wander back to their past, or to current anxieties. School lessons are often insufficiently captivating and they are just unable to concentrate. They may simply produce poor work as a result or they may engage in disruptive activities which may generate enough excitement and amusement to distance their minds from more sombre and gruesome considerations. Sometimes there may be an activity, such as football, which successfully captures their attention for the time they are engaged in it. But sometimes there is nothing at all on which they can stay focused.

[1] In order to resolve the difficulty and awkwardness of writing he/she, his/her, and in acknowledgement of the problematic nature of the traditional use of the male pronoun to cover both cases, the female pronoun is used generically throughout this booklet.

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Rule testing

Children who have been through violent and chaotic experiences may feel themselves to be out of control. They may also feel oddly responsible for their bad experiences. That bad things have happened to them because they are bad. They therefore have to test the world around them to see if there are some controls and some limits, and perhaps to find out how bad they really are. If they find that things are more or less under control, and that their bad behaviour is given appropriate recognition and meets appropriate levels of disapproval which gives it an appropriate sense of proportion, then they will feel safer. If their bad behaviour is ignored or insufficiently sanctioned, they are likely to escalate it until they find some firmer limits.

Withdrawal

The above categories are all of children who actively attract attention. However, there are others who simply withdraw, sometimes falling behind in their school work, sometimes managing the work quite adequately but failing to make social relationships or to enjoy themselves in any way at school. This may be because of their own memories or because of the current demands being made on them at home by their traumatised parents and siblings. Such children can suffer a social isolation that goes largely unnoticed or they may become victims of bullying by other children.

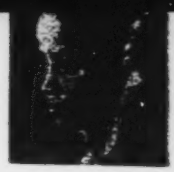
Falling behind in school work

Like the previous category these children attract relatively little attention. They can be friendly, co-operative, sociable and may appear to be adapting quite adequately. Yet they either fall behind in their school work or, where they start with some ground to make up, just never manage to make that progress. They are often quite responsible at home and helpful at school. They just do not make progress with their own learning.

Age inappropriate behaviour

Sometimes these children seem very grown up and responsible and at other times very childish or babyish in relation to their actual age. It is as if they stopped growing up gradually at a certain age, say four, and suddenly became 24. Deprived of the protection and freedom from responsibility of a four year old, they were suddenly exposed to the horrors of the adult world and had to become sensitive to the needs of parents and siblings and attempt to assume adult responsibilities in relation to them. They have missed out on being children. So, having to continue to be 'grown up' at home, they take the opportunity afforded by school to reclaim their childhood. They go back to being four!

the children's experience



The children have usually had quite horrific experiences. Some have had to stand and watch while their mother or father has been shot or butchered. Some have watched their mothers or sisters being raped. Others have had parents or siblings disappear and have gone through days, weeks or months of anxiety, not knowing if they were dead or alive. Some have been taken to prisons to see their parents being tortured. Others have been in prison and may have been beaten or tortured themselves.

All of them have lost their home, their friends, their community and a way of life with which they were more or less happy and contented and have been plunged into a nightmare of fear, uncertainty and alienation. Their flight from danger will have been confused, chaotic and fraught with uncertainty about whether they were going to make it or not.

Some will have been sent by adults and will have made the journey alone, often very confused about why they were leaving and where they were going. When they arrive in the UK they may not know what has happened to the rest of the family – who is dead, who is still alive. They may find themselves living with distant relatives who are unable to act as parental substitutes, or in children's homes. They may be quite alone.

Those who have come with parents will have experienced their parents being terrified and uncertain on the journey. When they arrive here, their parents are no longer the people they were with a place in the community, an understanding of how the world works, and ability to care for and teach their children. Instead they have become second class citizens, not allowed to work, recipients of charity, people unable to speak the language, and unable to fill in even quite simple forms or complete the simplest of transactions without assistance.

Worse still, the parents may be quite unable to deal with what has happened to them and their children. They may be so shocked, they are unable to remember clearly what they have been through, much less talk coherently to their children about what has actually happened. The children are then faced with a whole lot of horrific and terrifying experiences which they cannot make sense of nor come to terms with, just when those adults on whom they are most dependent and on whom they would normally rely to help them sort things out seem to be even more in need of help than they are themselves. At this point the children readily become protective of the parents and begin to avoid bringing up the topics that they know their parents find distressing.

Finding their own feelings overwhelming, they discover that their parents are even more overwhelmed. They therefore do their best to do as their parents do and as their parents wish them to do, which is to push the whole thing to the back of their minds and try to carry on as though it never happened. In doing this they have to ignore both their own experiences of the past and their current experience of how their parents are often depressed, sad, unable to cope or explosively angry. They therefore do their best to repress their memories and put a lid on their feelings. As a result of which they express their distress unconsciously in a variety of ways. They may become withdrawn, cut off, unable to concentrate or hyperactive and disruptive, and frequently explosive when small incidents trigger a release of all the bottled up fear, frustration and rage.

Those whose parents have been killed are likely to have been traumatised by the shock and to be struggling to find a place of safety and understanding where they might begin to mourn their loss. Those who have lost their parents without knowing what has happened to them will probably be full of almost unthinkable and inexpressible fears and anxieties about what might have happened to them. At the same time they have no one to whom they can turn for emotional support, understanding and help in expressing their feelings.

It is also significant that they have all been failed by adults in authority who, from the government in their own country to the immigration department in this country, and even their own parents, have either terrorised them, or failed to protect them. They may

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therefore be particularly explosive with teachers who appear not to maintain a safe level of order and control in classrooms. In their own countries they may have been used to a much stricter classroom regime, aggressively enforced. This may be remembered in retrospect as a situation that felt safe. So the more liberal classrooms of the UK can easily feel dangerously out of control. Just as the level of order in their society and community broke down, so an insufficient level of control in class can feel like another breakdown of social order. This may be particularly acutely felt where they are the recipients of racist remarks or the sort of jibes that may echo their traumatic experiences. Being told 'your mother is a whore' may have a devastating impact on a boy who has seen his mother raped.

Bullying, which can be a frightening and even devastating experience for all children may evoke particularly terrifying memories of persecution, even of being tortured, and feelings of there being no safety anywhere. Similarly any sort of violence, or the threat of it may recall past feelings of fear and rage.

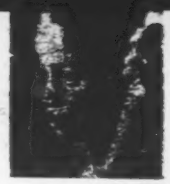
Searching for adults they can trust and respect, they may have very high expectations of their teachers, both in terms of their availability and in terms of their capacity to be fair and just. When these expectations are not met, they may feel extremely let down, hurt and angry.

For many of these children school is a particularly difficult experience. Some may not have attended school before because war has closed all the schools. Others may have come from rural areas where there is little formal education and little, if any reading and writing, even among the adults. In some places girls may have been excluded from the school system or given a very specific and circumscribed schooling.

Children who are not literate in their own language can take much longer to learn a new one such as English. Moreover, their lack of understanding of English can make it difficult, if not impossible to follow a lesson in class. Their minds are then more likely to wander and are more readily invaded by horrific memories. Disruptive, diversionary or attention seeking behaviour can then become a way of keeping painful and frightening thoughts and memories at bay.

At home, those who succeed in learning English more rapidly may find themselves acting as the family representative in transactions with various institutions – DSS, housing department, doctor, hospital, etc. They may take time off from school to carry out these functions, then find themselves in trouble at school for absenteeism, as well as falling behind in their work.

At the same time another struggle may be taking place between home and school over cultural identity. Uncertain and confused about their own identity, they may identify with Afro-Caribbean children or other groups with whom they detect some similarity to themselves. Others identify with the modern English culture and become preoccupied with such emblems as 'Nike' trainers or other fashion accessories. Alternatively they may cling rigidly to their traditional culture, or their particular version of it, striving to please their parents and meet their expectations.



Experiences that cause acute stress and distress to children

Violence against themselves, family, friends. Violence affecting the whole community, as in war, where fear spreads through the whole community and children often witness the bloodshed.

Loss of parents, siblings, members of extended family, friends, homes, cultures, ways of life.

Sudden change: having to adapt to a completely new set of circumstances – educational, social economic, material and physical, climatic, where there is hardly any dimension of life that remains constant.

Injustice on such a large scale and affecting them in such a powerful and intrusive way that their sense of there being some fairness and justice in the world is severely undermined.

Blame and scapegoating in which they are persecuted and attacked for some specific characteristic such as skin colour, culture, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Lack of supportive relationships: the effects of all the above are greatly compounded if the child has no opportunity to communicate with supportive adults and other children about what has happened to them.

Extreme poverty and deprivation: children may have suffered this in their own country, in refugee camps, and here in the UK under recent asylum legislation.

What helps children deal with their distressing experiences

Belonging: feeling they belong, to at least one adult, who is emotionally attuned to their feelings, to a family, to a community (whether host community or exile community), to a school, to a social group.

Thinking: being able to think about their experiences. This usually requires the child having relationships with others, both adults and children, but particularly adults with whom she can talk and get some help in making sense of what has happened. Thinking requires concepts and ideas which are usually gained through discussion. Distressing experiences often lead to misunderstanding, confusion and self doubt, which another viewpoint can help sort out.

Agency: feeling they can make some active choices in their lives helps to shift the sense of helplessness, powerlessness, feeling out of control and a victim of the decisions of others.

Cultural integration: finding a sense of continuity between the culture of their own country and that of their new one. Being able to mourn aspects of their culture that they have lost, continue those they can keep going and explore the host culture to find their own place in it.

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the teachers' response

Most teachers chose the job of teaching because they like children and want to give them something good. When children are unhappy or suffering, teachers want to help – to alleviate the pain, to quell the rage and anguish and to find constructive solutions to the children's problems. They are therefore likely to be perplexed and even distressed by children to whom it is extremely difficult to give something good: children whose hurt is so deep it is difficult to reach, and whose pain is so great it is impossible to alleviate in the short term, and whose rage is so great that when it comes out it is quite uncontrollable.

Teachers will wish to make all sorts of allowances for these children because of what they have suffered. They will therefore often feel reluctant to challenge inappropriate behaviour when it occurs. They will often hope that tolerance, acceptance and understanding will eventually elicit more reasonable and appropriate behaviour from the child. When this approach fails to have the desired effect the teacher can become disappointed, frustrated and even angry with the child. They may then feel bad about having these feelings and in an attempt to suppress them, they may become even more inhibited about challenging the unacceptable behaviour.

Teachers may also feel uncertain about how much they should talk to the child about her painful experiences. At one level they feel out of their depth getting into an area they may feel is the province of trained counsellors or psychotherapists. They may also be reluctant to hear about the appalling experiences the child has had. This is a normal reaction. What has happened to these children is not pleasant to hear about. Indeed it can be distressing and disturbing. All of us working with refugees have this reaction. Some of us have chosen to take it on and have learned how to cope with it. Most teachers have not chosen it, nor have they had the training to cope with it. So it is no easy matter and no one should feel ashamed of wanting to steer clear of this sort of stuff.

Then there are other pupils to worry about. Teachers have to consider their responsibility to protect other pupils from the violent and disruptive behaviour of a particular child, however much they wish to be sympathetic and accommodating to that child's particular needs and painful experiences. They also want to get on with their primary task which is to teach.

In the midst of such complex feelings it is easy to feel a powerful wish to get rid of the painful problem, either by excluding the child from school, or by 'packing it off' to 'expert' counsellors, social workers or psychotherapists. It is also easy to fall out with one's colleagues both inside and outside the school. It is easy to blame social workers, psychologists, child psychotherapists, psychiatrists, etc for not doing enough for a troubled or disruptive child, for not somehow sorting the child out and making her feel better. It is also easy for teachers to polarise into two camps: the one insisting on the needs of the school and wishing to exclude the child, the other insisting on the needs of the child and feeling critical of the apparent intolerance of those who wish to exclude her.

It is also tempting to feel critical of parents, who may appear insufficiently concerned about their child's problems, excessively preoccupied with their own difficulties, helpless, unwilling to liaise sufficiently with the school, unable or unwilling to control their child's behaviour, etc.

Teachers can also be influenced by media portrayals of 'economic migrants' and the culture of disbelief which emanates from government asylum policies. These suspicions can easily be fed if the child or her family appear secretive or give confused or apparently inconsistent information about the child's age or previous schooling. Sometimes the information available to teachers about a particular student is sparse. A teacher may learn one thing from the official records only to hear something quite contradictory in the staff room. All this can leave a teacher feeling confused frustrated and impatient. From that point it can be all too easy to take one's frustration out on the child, even in quite subtle ways, and even without being fully aware of doing it.

the parents' experience

When children are having difficulties at school, establishing links with the home can be crucial. However, establishing good communication with the parents of traumatised refugee children is not easy.

The parents are often eager to please and to do the right thing. They want their children to forget the past, look to the future and do well at school. At the same time they may be very reluctant to believe their child has a problem. They so much want to believe that the horrific experiences the family has gone through have not affected the children, that they convince themselves the children are OK, and they are very reluctant to accept evidence to the contrary.

They may easily feel blamed and criticised when told by the school that their child is having difficulties or causing a problem. They may also feel the school has not understood them, nor their child. They may readily believe the child's explanation, or form their own view that the problems are the result of teachers not understanding the child's needs, other pupils picking on the child, racism in the school, etc, and refuse to see that the child's reaction is still disproportionate or symptomatic of other sources of distress. And it has to be said in passing that sometimes they have a point. Schools can be defensive too and feel blamed and criticised when confronted with issues of bullying and racism in the school, when they have worked hard to eradicate them. They may well insist that their anti-bullying and anti-racist policies are in place, and refuse to examine indications that these policies may not actually be working very effectively.

However, parents in these situations will seldom challenge the school directly. Partly perhaps because they sense the school's defensiveness. But more importantly because they do not want to cause, or get into, any more trouble. They are grateful to be allowed to live in a country where their lives are safe, even if they have to tolerate racist abuse in the streets and the label of 'economic migrants' or 'bogus asylum seekers' from the politicians and the media. Moreover they are mostly in the process of applying for asylum and they do not want to risk antagonising authorities who, for all they know or imagine, might well have some influence on whether or not they are allowed to stay in the country. They may also be wary of the school as an official institution, particularly if schools in their own country have assisted governments by implementing oppressive or discriminatory policies or by informing the police of subversive thinking or speaking. Even in this country they may fear disclosing information which, if it leaked out and got back to their own country, could endanger relatives, friends and associates still living there. Then of course there is the problem of not speaking the language and all the difficulties and feelings of impotence or inferiority that go with neither being able to understand readily what is being said nor being able readily to make one's own thoughts and feelings understood.

It is therefore quite possible, or even probable that, on meeting with teachers, the parents will listen attentively, nod, and even agree, or at least appear to agree with what is being said. They may even state explicitly their agreement that there is a problem and agree to work on it with the child at home or to accept a referral for psychological help. At the same time they may privately have a completely different view of what is wrong which they do not feel able to put forward openly. Moreover, an encounter where they are asked to consider the possibility that events they do not wish to remember may still be having an effect on their children, is probably a meeting they want to end ASAP and not prolong by arguing.

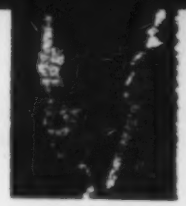
Such stand offs are not easily overcome and it may take a lot of time and effort for teaching staff to establish a real rapport and understanding with these parents. And such time and effort is not always possible given the other demands made on teachers' time and the limited time span of their responsibility for particular pupils.

Furthermore, parents who come from cultures with harsher and more disciplinarian school regimes may be bemused by the school's difficulties controlling quite small, or even larger children. They may be completely unused to schools seeking parents' assistance in maintaining order at school rather than having their own methods of enforcement. It

may therefore be difficult to help the parents understand the seriousness of the situation and the way it is being handled.

Where the child is not being looked after by her parents, but by siblings or more distant relatives or even foster parents, there may be additional complications. The carers may not know the child well. If they have shared the child's traumatic experiences, they may be just as unhinged by them as the child is. If they have not shared the experiences, they might not want to know about them. They may feel they are doing as much as they are able to in providing a roof, food and clothing for the child and are somewhat at a loss as to what else they might provide. Involvement with the school may feel like one more burden they can do without.

the school



The most disturbed and distressed clients of therapeutic, health and social work agencies have an uncanny knack of homing in on the fault lines of both the organisation and the individuals who work in it. The same sort of thing is likely to happen with very distressed and traumatised children in a school. Whatever defensiveness or inconsistencies there may be in school policies, whatever discrepancies between policy and practice, whatever splits over educational philosophy or approach, whatever tensions or conflicts between members of staff, and whatever individual weaknesses or blind spots individual staff members may have, they are likely to be brought into sharper focus by these particular children.

Discipline is a particularly noteworthy area. In modern times many schools rely on a caring approach and on appeals to reason whereby sympathetic discussions are held with miscreant children to help them understand the anti-social impact of their behaviour. Usually, in such settings, these discussions are productive, and are of course an infinitely more desirable and civilised way of raising and maintaining acceptable standards of behaviour than regimes based primarily on punishment. However, if this approach fails, many schools seem to be left with no other resort except exclusion, either temporarily through suspension, or permanently through expulsion. In many cases there does not even seem to be the possibility of a severe telling off, or dressing down. Where such a possibility does exist, it may not be used with wounded refugee children because of a wish to avoid causing them further distress. Thus the whole system can lurch from sweet reason to expulsion in a very short space of time.

This is bewildering to children and parents who may have come from a school system where discipline is much tighter and more rigorously enforced by both tongue lashings and physical beatings. In the absence of even relatively mild verbal admonishments, children and adolescents from such cultures may be largely unable to recognise the seriousness of their offences or of the whole situation. Then, suddenly, they are excluded from the school!

When these children are the victims of bullying or hostility from other children, they may feel the school's authority and discipline is again weak because the offenders are not more severely disciplined. This will add to their sense that in the past, authorities have either persecuted or failed to protect them, or both, and are therefore to be neither trusted nor respected.

In some schools there is a more or less overt division between those staff who incline towards liberal, permissive, understanding approaches to children, and those who favour more traditional, authoritative approaches. Those refugee children who present behaviour problems are highly likely to hit the fault line between these two tendencies, so that the staff become divided between those who find the behaviour intolerable and insist that something be done about it – possibly exclusion – and those who feel that the child and their behaviour must be accepted and tolerated, and allowances be made because of the child's traumatic experiences. The two tendencies easily push each other into polarised positions where a dialogue between them becomes extremely fraught and the possibility of a compromise becomes increasingly difficult to entertain.[2]

In these situations consultation with child care and mental health professionals from family and child consultation services may be useful in facilitating a dialogue. Alternatively staff within the school may be able to recognise the problem and facilitate a more creative dialogue in which the problems of the child, and the needs of the school for order and security for all its pupils can be reconciled. Much depends on the ability of the school to recognise its own internal politics and the way these can be brought into sharp relief by these particular children, and on the ability of staff to have constructive disagreements.

[2] Obviously this description of the positions taken risks being crude and oversimplified. Nevertheless it is important to recognise the fact that disagreements do occur that do reflect teachers' personal, political and philosophical positions, and they can in the course of trying to address the actual problems become increasingly polarised. There is *no* ready solution to this but recognising it is happening can help a lot.

what can be done?

At this point in the booklet the reader will, in the preceding sections, have gathered a lot of information about horrific experiences, distress and helplessness. It has been 10 pages of problems and no solutions! Which may have left readers feeling somewhat bombarded if not actually overwhelmed by it all. It may be difficult to think, and a section headed 'What can be done' offers the promise of some clear directions as to what courses of action to take.

Unfortunately it is not possible to simply list a series of actions that can be taken. The situation really requires teachers to remain emotionally engaged and to think creatively, which is not an easy thing to do. We can offer some guidelines and some ideas. We cannot guarantee they will work. And whatever we suggest, it will have to be implemented with flexibility, imagination and sensitivity to the specific situation.

What is most important to remember is that understanding the situation is a positive act. It is not synonymous with doing nothing. Even if a full understanding is impossible, the attempt to understand the situation rather than simply seeking a quick solution, can guide and inform whatever actions are taken.

Managing one's own feelings and being realistic

The first thing one has to do in these situations is to cope with one's own sense of helplessness. It may feel awful to feel so helpless but it may also be a realistic response.

The experiences the children have had cannot be changed. They cannot just forget what has happened although they may try very hard to do so, because this would involve denying their own history and experience, and often denying the existence of other family members who have been lost. It will take them some time to mourn their losses and to come to terms with what has happened. This is the process through which they have to be tolerated and helped. And it takes time!

The teacher may also have many other feelings including impatience, frustration and isolation. Keeping this all to oneself is usually unhelpful whereas talking to colleagues may not only relieve the sense of isolation but may also help understand what is happening, especially to the teacher herself, her colleagues, and within the school community.

It is also important to be realistic about disagreements with colleagues, and the way in which existing personal and political tensions in the school may be activated in these situations. These things are likely to occur, and trying to ignore them or wish them away is likely to make matters worse. Whereas, if they can be thought about constructively and an effort made to understand the different points of view, it may be possible to negotiate them more constructively.

What the children need

What they principally need is to feel they can be contained and understood, and still included in the life and learning activities of the school.

To feel contained, they need to have their own behaviour and that of others satisfactorily managed. They need to be protected from bullying and undue provocation, and they need to be firmly restrained from hurting their fellows or disrupting their work. They need to experience justice and fairness in the school and to have a sense that they are neither disadvantaged nor specially privileged with regard to what behaviour is considered acceptable. When their behaviour is not acceptable they need to be told in no uncertain terms so that they understand the severity of the situation. When others transgress against them, they need to see the standards similarly enforced.

Like most children, they need to be liked, appreciated and encouraged, and to have teachers be interested in them without being intrusive. They also want to learn. The teacher has to manage the trick of treating them like 'normal' children while at the same time recognising that they have suffered quite extraordinary experiences which makes their reactions at times quite 'abnormal'.

Constancy can be very important to them. Seeing and being spoken to by the same teacher every day, can provide a reassuring sense of stability. So can being in the same classroom or the same part of the school

building or campus; whereas constantly encountering different staff, and moving from one bit of the school to another can resonate with the chaos disruption and dislocation they have already experienced.

Obviously, it is possible to refer children and their families, to specialist counselling and psychotherapeutic agencies such as the local Child and Family Consultation Service, or organisations specialising in work with refugees. However, whatever help the child and family may be receiving outside the school, it is unlikely to immediately alleviate the situation in the school. Counselling, psychotherapy and family therapy can all provide the opportunity for the child to come to terms with her memories and express her distress. It cannot speed the process up nor take away the distress. The school is thus left with the task of living with the child's unhappiness.

This is not to say the child will be incapable of play and laughter and having fun. Indeed these things often occur and need to be encouraged. But there needs to be recognition that a laugh, a joke and a good game of football do not restore what has been lost, they just make the pain a little more bearable.

One of the most important things to remember is that many of these children, particularly younger children, can easily come to feel that bad things have happened to them and their families because they themselves are bad. It is therefore important to distinguish bad **behaviour** from being a bad **person** and to recognise the child's strengths and virtues as well as her weaknesses and difficulties.

Managing the children's behaviour

It is important to let them know where they stand. If they are out of order, let them know firmly and clearly, and promptly. If their behaviour is so anti-social or disruptive that their continued attendance at the school is in question, let them know that.

It is also helpful for there to be graduated stages of admonishment for unacceptable behaviour so that the child is aware of the increasing severity of the problem. This may be emphasised by deploying staff at increasing levels of the school hierarchy, e.g. form teacher, year head, deputy head of school, etc as the seriousness of the problem increases and the point of exclusion is approached.

Such factors can easily be overlooked in the absence of detailed reports of the incidents.

If they are falling behind in their work or appear isolated and unhappy, let them know this has been noticed. It may be enough simply to acknowledge how they are, or it may be something for which some additional provision needs to be made.

If they are given a hard time by other children, let them know that has been recognised too. Where this takes the form of bullying and/or racism, the school and its staff need not only to be doing their utmost to put a stop to it, but also to be seen to be doing so. These children can be hyper-sensitive to unfairness and injustice.

Where there is a specific 'incident' it is valuable for this to be recorded in detail. Some children react to specific triggers, such as specific words or gestures like being pointed at. Reactions to male or female teachers may also be significantly different.

Keep their parents or guardians informed of how the child is doing in school. Even if they themselves are unresponsive, it is still valuable for them to be told clearly what is happening at school, what the problems are and what the consequences are likely to be.

Referral for specialist help

It will usually be possible to refer children and their families for family therapy or family counselling and/or to refer the children for counselling or child psychotherapy, although some agencies may have a lengthy waiting list. The School Psychological Service will usually be able to advise about this. Appendix B has a list of agencies from which specialist help, information and advice can be obtained.

When referrals are made it is often valuable for the teacher most involved with the child to attend some of the counselling/family therapy meetings with the family, in order to provide a view from the school. Otherwise the child and family may be unable to grasp what the difficulties at school actually are.

It is also possible for the school to seek consultations from such child and family consultation services or specialist refugee organisations.

A supportive adult in school

Because their trust in and respect for adults has been enormously undermined, and because their parents may be emotionally unavailable because of their own state of shock and distress, it can be particularly helpful for these children to have a specific adult to whom they can talk and to whom they can turn at times of particular difficulty. A teacher can sometimes fulfil this role. It does not need to be a school counsellor, nor a teacher with any particular training. It is not

professional skills that are required so much as an adult who is interested and sensitive but at the same time clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Where a school has, or can make a link with the refugee community from the child's own country, there may be volunteers who can provide this function, attending the school to provide the child with support and guidance in particular areas of school life.

One advantage of using such volunteers is that they know the child's home country and can talk to her about that. They are also able to understand the specific difficulties the child may have in making the transition from their original society and education system to the one they have to join in this country. This enables the child to have some sense of continuity between her past and her present rather than feeling that her past is like a dream and the only reality is the present, or alternatively that only her past was real and she now lives in some sort of dream.

Such volunteers can also provide links with other members of the refugee community which can further ameliorate the child's sense of discontinuity and alienation. However, care needs to be exercised in the appointment of such volunteers and they themselves may need support and supervision. They need to appreciate that their role is to help the child learn and understand the various dimensions of her situation, not simply to make the child behave better or conform to expectations.

Where such links with the refugee community are not available there is still much that a teacher can contribute simply by recognising these problems of loss and discontinuity and being interested in the child's home country and past experiences.

Welcoming refugees, adapting the curriculum, providing after school facilities, etc

There are a number of ways in which schools can respond to the general needs of refugee children. These involve ways of introducing them into the school, helping them to feel welcomed and accepted and helping them to find their way around a new and unfamiliar setting, adapting the curriculum to include their countries and cultures and their experiences of war, dislocation and exile, and the provision of extra-curricular activities that address their specific needs. Descriptions of such schemes are outside the scope of this booklet but Appendix C suggests some relevant texts for those interested in these further possibilities.

While these various schemes may not prevent the sort of problems we have described from arising, they do nevertheless provide the sort of friendly supportive atmosphere in which these problems are somewhat less likely to occur or be so acute and are more likely to be managed successfully.

Where there is a significant number of refugee children in a school it is valuable to have a school policy that addresses their needs. It is also valuable to review that policy regularly and to involve the teaching staff in the review process.

Teachers need the opportunity to discuss the problems and the solutions they may have found for them. They need their efforts and their ideas to be recognised and valued, and to know that when things do work out well with refugee children, they can justifiably feel they have contributed to the success.

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appendix A
case studies

Kamal was referred to our project by one of the teachers in the refugee team of a London Borough after several 'violent' incidents in his secondary school year seven in which he was perceived to exhibit 'dangerous' behaviour, not simply fighting but becoming very violent 'as if he wanted to murder' his opponent.

Kamal's parents were killed early in the war in his country and his care was carried out by his seven older siblings who eventually came into exile in Britain.

In our first meeting with Kamal and some of his brothers and sisters it became clear that he was often left alone and that though he received some material care no one was involved in his life at his level of emotional need. No one talked with him about the past or the present, his memories, his confusion or his fears. His brothers and sisters wanted to study and advance their job prospects and to forget their own painful memories. Kamal was desperate for adult attention.

When we met with staff from the school we encountered different views. Some found him frightening not just because of the ferocity of his fighting but because he refused to stop when they told him to and had to be physically restrained. Others were irritated with him because numerous discussions with him about his behaviour seemed to have made no difference. There was also some sympathy for him and a sense that he really did want to do better.

What struck us was that his fights occurred in response to what he perceived as provocation, invariably in classrooms or in corridors where a staff member was present. When staff were absent he seemed to do much better at staying out of trouble. Our meetings with him revealed that he was completely bewildered and anxious that in Britain teachers allowed children to 'mess about' in class.

His anxiety was compounded by his difficulties in English and in understanding the work.

He knew he was supposed to be 'good' but could not manage to control his behaviour as he could not manage the confused feelings inside him. The feelings were very strong and he did not have a vocabulary for all the related concepts such as feeling different, feeling afraid, terrified, anxious, sad, feeling unable to be a good enough student, etc.

We believed he needed a key 'adult' in school with whom he could slowly build a trusting relationship and with whom he could talk through all his muddles about life in school. It was also important that this adult could be firm with him and set clear boundaries particularly with regard to fighting. The difficulty in this school was the high turnover of teachers – so even his 'key' relationships changed and lead to him feeling vulnerable and anxious again at the beginning of his second year, with an increase of him being involved in fights.

Kamal's family did not want to change their behaviour towards him or to support his attendance at our centre. They took the view that he was simply the victim of racism from other children and teachers and he would learn to deal with it in time. To move from this view would, it seemed, have raised too many difficult memories for the whole family, which had found its own equilibrium, in a new country and was working out its own future.

This situation is difficult for the school because they were unable to successfully engage Kamal's family in working together with them, and the family also turned down the possibility of continued family consultations with us. The school staff were thus left, to a significant extent, trying to hold the problem on their own.

The tasks the school staff were faced with were: managing Kamal's behaviour, managing their own strong feelings and differences of opinion, providing some recognition of Kamal's complex feelings and providing some continuity of relationship with an interested and supportive adult. As long as they managed to keep all these balls in the air Kamal began to settle down. But as soon as the equilibrium was disturbed, by the change in his teachers to whom he had become attached, and on whom he had come, to some

extent, to rely, then he found himself once again in trouble.

Ali's story

Ali came from the Middle East with his mother and three sisters. His father had been imprisoned and tortured for criticising the government. Ali at the age of six had visited his father in a damp underground isolation cell. When his father was released and returned home, he was anxious and withdrawn, quite unlike the man who had previously been an outgoing and entertaining father much loved by his four children.

As political tensions heightened and the level of violence between the government and its opponents escalated, the family decided to flee the country. During their escape they became separated from their father. Ali's mother travelled on foot with the four children across the country to the border where they escaped into a neighbouring state. On that journey they saw fighting, dead bodies, looting, and one of their cousins was shot in front of them. Ali's mother subsequently insisted all the children were too young to be affected by all this.

Eventually the family arrived in the UK, found somewhere to live and places for the children in schools. They still had no idea what had happened to their father, nor whether they would ever see him again.

Soon after Ali began school he shocked his classmates and teachers with the violence of his attack on another boy who had pushed in front of him in a dinner queue. Sometime after this he was reported to have threatened and frightened a younger child in the playground. Then while fooling around in craft lesson, he somehow managed to stab another boy with a pair of scissors. Fortunately the other boy was not seriously injured but this was more by luck than judgement.

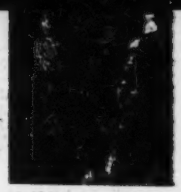
As a result of this, following as it did the two preceding incidents, Ali's behaviour became a focus of concern, not just for school staff, but also for the parents of other children who were demanding that the school ensure the safety of its pupils.

Ali shrugged off all the incidents, feeling he was being unfairly picked on and that much was being made of a minor altercation, a casual remark and an accident that occurred in the course of innocent play. His mother largely supported his view, insisting that he was well behaved at home and feeling that the school was somehow misunderstanding him and treating him rather unfairly. At the same time there were hints that he could be aggressive and provocative at home and a sense that his mother, overburdened with anxiety about her husband, the stress of flight and exile, and the struggle to make some sort of life for her children in the UK, tended to let her children get on with their fights and squabbles without herself getting much involved. These fights seemed often to be quite intense and to only just stop short of serious violence.

At the same time, the children seemed largely unable to talk about their anxieties about their father, or the ways in which they missed him. Indeed he seemed hardly to be referred to at all. Their mother, although she spent much time thinking about her husband never mentioned this to the children, not wanting to burden them with her worries. She also did not discuss with them the escape from their own country and the violence they had encountered as she did not think they remembered any of it. However it seemed the children themselves remembered a good deal of it, and would frequently refer to what they had seen and how they had reacted, not in a mutually supportive way, but as a way of teasing, taunting and belittling each other.

The school struggled to engage Ali's mother in a constructive dialogue but she seemed unable to respond, or perhaps the school was simply unable to find the right line of approach. The staff struggled hard with their wish, on the one hand to understand and support Ali, and on the other hand to recognise and respond to the concerns of other parents with regard to Ali's violence. However the crucial problem was that they seemed unable to connect with Ali. It was a school with a population of generally well behaved children who were given considerable freedom and responsibility. Discipline consisted almost entirely of discussions with children that enabled them to see the undesirability of their misbehaviour and to choose, of their own free will, to discontinue it. Ali simply could not handle such freedom and responsibility, and the school eventually could not handle him. He was expelled after further incidents of fighting and bullying.

He eventually settled down at another school. However, there were a number of circumstances which seemed to combine to contribute to his improvement. First, his father finally found his way to the UK and rejoined the family. Second, he was attending



a group for children with similar experiences at the Medical Foundation. Third, his new school had a substantial number of refugee children, and a somewhat less permissive culture where his aggressiveness was likely to be more firmly rejected both by the staff and the other pupils.

This was a situation where it appears that the best thing the school could do was to contain Ali's aggressive behaviour, while the family began to sort things out at home and Ali got some specific help for himself at the therapeutic group.

Stefan's story

Stefan was referred to our project by his primary school. The specific referrer was the school special needs teacher who was troubled that this unusually small boy, though bright intellectually, seemed to have no capacity to socialise with the other children in his class. She was puzzled that though he seemed sweet and compliant in individual conversations with adults, in the group situation of the classroom and the playground both the teachers and his peers quickly became very irritated by him. He seemed to have no capacity to understand or to learn the rules of the classroom; specifically ideas of the personal space and privacy of other children, of sharing the teacher with other children, or sharing in play.

Stefan's form teachers in the first three years of school has found him impossible to manage in the classroom, but as is frequently the situation, with children referred to us, the teachers in the school were divided in their views about Stefan, and other teachers in the school had no difficulties in managing him and could not see what the problem was. When his second year teacher was away on maternity leave the experienced substitute teacher did not find him to be difficult. After a very problematic third year the teachers invited Stefan's parents into the school and shared their concerns about his development and socialisation in school with them. Both parents were refugees who had come together with their toddler son into exile to seek asylum in Britain. The school knew nothing about the detail of Stefan's parents background but referred the family to us because they were refugees and because Stefan's difficulties seemed to continue.

We went into the school and talked with Stefan's form teacher and with the special needs teacher. They were puzzled that Stefan's behaviour did not change even after explanations from the teachers to Stefan and his parents. We agreed that we would invite the family to meet us and see if they wanted our involvement. We also suggested that we could observe Stefan in school as part of our work.

It was extraordinarily difficult to set up a meeting between the school, the family and ourselves. After some time we began to think that there was a communication difficulty between the school and the parents, who did speak enough English to talk with us about Stefan. It was unclear what exactly prevented straight clear communication between the school and the parents. The first family meeting was attended by Stefan and his mother, though we had explicitly discussed with the school that it would be most helpful if the whole family came to the meeting accompanied by a representative from the school. The mother was very tearful about her past and did not want to talk about this to Stefan; Stefan's mother was very clear that her son had no difficulties except that he experienced racist abuse near their home and that the family wanted to move out of London to where some family members lived. Stefan and his two small siblings wished to move out of London. Stefan's mother said that she had spoken with his present class teacher and that he was doing fine now and only his previous teacher had difficulties! She said that she would work with us if necessary but that she could see no necessity.

We were still puzzled about the communication channels between the school and the parents, however as Stefan's mother agreed to us making some observation visits in his school we proceeded with this.

From our developmental perspective Stefan seemed much less mature than his peers. We wondered if he was experiencing no encouragement to develop and grow up or if in fact his parents wanted unconsciously for him to remain immature and childish as they were worried about managing the consequences of his maturity, when he would ask reasonable questions about his past.

In the school playground there was a fight between two boys in Stefan's class, one also a refugee from a different country to Stefan. The fight and its consequences roused both curiosity and anxiety in Stefan. He approached the tearful, angry Angolan boy who was protesting about injustice and his wounds and asked repeatedly in a fussy, anxious voice if the boy was alright. He

obviously was not alright and became, even in his distress, very irritated with Stefan and told him to go away in an aggressive tone. Some other children also told Stefan to go away as he was making things worse and though he protested that he wanted to help he withdrew to the edge of the crowd. He could not understand his position in the group or the impact of his presence. Later the same day in a lesson he was totally absorbed and involved in a story that was being acted, in the classroom where several other children were becoming restless. We were left with several questions about what had caused Stefan's emotional development to be so stuck. In a class of eight or nine year olds he behaved like a six year old, surrounded by older siblings, though he was in fact chronologically the same age as the other children. It seemed that the school were concerned that he would not cope in secondary school and that the reasons for Stefan's immaturity were rooted within his family.

It is noteworthy that all three examples are of boys. This is because all the requests for consultations we have received have been about boys. Is this because the boys have more problems, or because the girls' difficulties get overlooked?

After many attempts we were finally able to arrange a meeting between the parents, the school and ourselves to clarify the problems perceived. After this meeting we could begin to address the problems, both at the level of the school who were able to meet more regularly and communicate more clearly with both the parents and with the family who we encouraged to communicate in a more clear way with Stefan by putting expectations on him to interact in a more mature way and being more regularly available to discuss his past and present confusion and mistaken assumptions about his family history. We encouraged both the parents to talk with Stefan about their brave stand against the repressive authorities in their country which had resulted in them both being imprisoned and hurt by the soldiers. We also encouraged them to talk about family life at home, the grandmother who had taken special care of Stefan and the parents' long and good relationship with each other.

All these interventions together over a period of two years enabled Stefan to move forward in his development. Communication between Stefan and his parents had been blocked as both parents were afraid of becoming so overwhelmed and distressed by talking openly about the pains and pleasures of their pasts that they could not function in the present. As they became able to communicate more simply and directly with Stefan he began to understand his past and his history. By practising communication in his family he became better able to manage in school.

The school's contribution in this situation was first to recognise the problem, second to refer to outside agency when its own efforts were unsuccessful and third to work in conjunction with the outside agency.

Particularly, Stefan's teachers learned to support and encourage him without allowing him to disrupt lessons or get their attention whenever he demanded it.

His first teacher had become impatient and exasperated and had started to find him almost unmanageable. His second teacher also initially felt angry and impatient and that she was failing as a teacher. She then began refusing to respond to his inappropriate demands for instant attention, but felt guilty about it. However, because she was genuinely interested in him and gave him attention at appropriate times she was able to overcome these guilt feelings and set realistic limits to his disruptive demands for attention in the class room and give her attention to the class as a whole.

In the interests of confidentiality, all these examples contain the central themes of, and issues concerning, the real dynamic between families and schools; we have disguised all aspects that could make families recognisable.

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appendix B
useful addresses and resources

Department for Education and Employment
2.S2 Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

School attendance and disadvantaged pupils team, *telephone* 020 7925 5813

General information about the education of asylum seeking children.

Department of Health
Wellington House
Room 541
133-135 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG

Department PH1F, *telephone* 020 7972 4671/4615

Local Child and Family Consultation Centres
These are local based multi-disciplinary community based mental health centres that focus on the needs of children and adolescents and their parents and carers. There is one such centre in each health authority. Staff working closely with Education and Social Services. A comprehensive list is available from Young Minds; *telephone* 020 7336 8445

Local Education Departments and in particular English as a Second Language teams and School Psychological Service – see telephone directory for local contacts or contact the DfEE; *telephone* 020 7925 5555

Medical Foundation Caring for Victims of Torture
Star House
104-108 Grafton Road
London NW5 4BD
telephone 020 7813 9999
fax 020 7813 0033

The Medical Foundation's Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy Team and Family and Marital Therapy Team work with survivors of political torture and war. They offer assessments, individual, family and group psychotherapeutic work with children, adolescents, parents and carers, consultation, teaching and staff development work.

Consultation Group – fortnightly on Thursdays between 5.00 and 6.30 pm

Minority Rights Group
379 Brixton Road
London SW9 7DE
telephone 020 7978 9498

The Refugee Council
3 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
telephone 020 7820 3000

Contact the Children's Section or Jill Rutter, Education Section.
The Refugee Council maintains an up to date list of refugee community organisations.

Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London NW3 5 BA
telephone 020 7435 7111

Consultation to teachers or staff groups by arrangement. For further information, contact Maureen Fox, Convenor Refugee Workshop.

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appendix C
further reading

Communicating with children: helping children in distress, Richman, N (1993), Save the Children.

Creative conflict resolution, Kreidler, W J (1984), Scott Freeman and Company.

Extraordinary childhoods: the social lives of refugee children, Candappa, M (2000), Thomas Coram Research Unit, 020 7612 6958, e-mail tetcmmc@ioe.ac.uk.
A qualitative research study, in collaboration with the Refugee Council, of four groups of refugee children: Bosnian, Turkish Kurd, Somali and Tamil boys and girls aged 11-14.

Giving refugee children and young people a voice: refugee children and young people's experiences of local services (1998), Camden Family Service Unit.

Helping children in difficult circumstances: manual for teachers, Richman, N (1991), Save the Children.

In the midst of the whirlwind, Richman, N (1998), Trentham Books.

Integrating refugee children into schools, Melzak, S and Warner, R (1992), The Medical Foundation Caring for Victims of Torture and the Minority Rights Group.

Mapping the field refugee education, ed. Rutter, J and Jones, C (1998), Trentham Books.

New to schooling: guidelines for schools, Simmons, K, Grey, H and Takashima, K (1988), London Borough of Barnet Directorate of Educational Services, MELSS (Barnet).

Personal and Social Education for primary schools through Circle Time, Curry, M and Bromfield, C (1995), NASEN.

Psychotherapeutic work with child and adolescent refugees from political violence, Melzak, S in 'Handbook of child and adolescent psychotherapy: psychoanalytic approaches', Lanyado, M and Horne, A (1999), Routledge.

Refugee children in the classroom, Rutter, J (1994), Trentham Books.

Refugee education handbook, LCAS, London Borough of Enfield (1999), LCAS Publications. (Available from LCAS, telephone 0208 803 4460).

Refugees: we left because we had to: an educational book for 14-18 year olds, Rutter, J (1991), Refugee Council.

Restoring playfulness: different approaches to assisting children who are psychologically affected by war or displacement, Tollfree, D (1996), Radda Barnen and Save the Children.

Spanner in the works, Brown, C, Barnfield, J and Stone, M (1990), Trentham Books.

Talking time: a guide to oral history for schools, Hewitt, M and Harris, A (1992), Learning by Design, Tower Hamlets Education.

Teaching refugee children a guide to resources, Bolloten, B and Spafford, T (May 1996), Newham English Language Service (The Credon Centre, Kirton Road, London E13 9DR)

Teachers handbook: teaching the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Save the Children and UNICEF UK (1990).

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Voices series, e.g. Voices from Somalia, ed. Warner, R (1991), Minority Rights Group.
A series of books discussing the history and context of political violence in various countries from children's perspective. Dual language books for children and teachers.

Why do they have to fight? Refugee children's stories from Bosnia, Kurdistan, Somalia and Sri Lanka, Rutter, J (1998), The Refugee Council.

Working with refugee children and adolescents from Kosova: guidelines for teachers, social workers, community workers and reception centre workers, Melzak, S and Kasabova, S (1999), The Medical Foundation Caring for Victims of Torture.

This booklet is for teachers and others working in a school setting. It is not about all refugee children, nor even the majority of refugee children. It is about those who present special difficulties. Some of the things said here may be applicable to refugee children more generally, others may not.

Attempting to understand the situation, is a positive act. It is not synonymous with doing nothing. The booklet is based on the work of a joint project between the Child Psychotherapy Trust and the Medical Foundation Caring for Victims of Torture. Since 1993 a child and adolescent psychotherapist and a family therapist have been working directly with refugee children of all ages and their families, and providing consultation to schools. We hope that you will find the booklet helpful.

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